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AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**SELF-CENSORSHIP AND JOURNALISM PRACTICE IN MAINSTREAM
MEDIA IN KENYA**

By

JAMES ODHIAMBO OKONG'O

535172

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Digital Journalism

Nairobi, Kenya

30/01/2020

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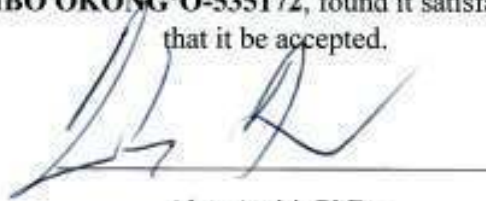
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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communication

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Digital Journalism

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of
JAMES ODHIAMBO OKONG'O-535172, found it satisfactory and recommended
that it be accepted.



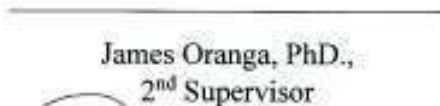
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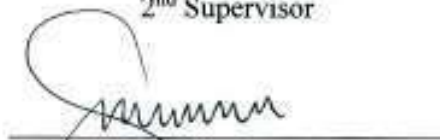
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DECLARATION

I, **JAMES ODHIAMBO OKONG'O-535172**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my own research endeavors.

James O.

Signature

30/01/2020

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between self-censorship and the practice of journalism in Kenya's mainstream media by answering the following questions: What factors drive self-censorship in Kenya's media? What impact does self-censorship have on the practice of journalism? And are journalists willing to self-censor? The study also discusses the findings of different scholars on self-censorship in Africa and other continents. Kenya has one of the most robust and pluralistic media in Africa, however, it still faces challenges in achieving its full potential as a public watchdog. The findings of this study show that self-censorship is a serious threat to the practice of journalism, the practice is linked to the diminishing trust in the media as well as the declining consumption of news content. The study sheds light on the major factors that lead journalists to self-censor categorizing them into three broad components namely: Institutional (ownership and editorial policies), National (politics, economic and legal factors), and personal/cultural factors. Journalists are forced into self-censoring by power players who include media owners, advertisers, the government and politicians. The power players have made regulations meant to put journalists under control, those who dare not to obey are punished. Besides, media organizations need advertisement revenue for survival thus they accept whatever corporate organizations, the state, and politicians tell them to do in exchange for advertising money. This has led to media owners and managers forcing journalists to work under certain policies that influence them to censor themselves. As a result, journalists choose not to write against the interest of power players. They hide facts, leave out information they think will upset the power players and are not willing to work on sensitive stories which they cannot write truths about. The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, the method provides a better chance to understand whether dishonorable journalistic practices, as well as the utilization of media organizations by several vested interests, are responsible for self-censorship among journalists. The study recommends that media organizations should focus on: production of quality news content, championing for the full implementation of Article 34 in Kenya's Constitution on press freedom and adhere to it, regulate media ownership, and align editorial policies to the journalistic principles.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CA:	Communications Authority
CPJ:	Committee to Protect Journalists
CJR:	Columbia Journalism Review
GAA:	Government Advertising Agency
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
ICC:	International Criminal Court
KADU:	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU:	Kenya African National Union
KCA:	Kenya Central Association
KICA:	Kenya Information and Communications Act
KII:	Key Informant Interview
KNA:	Kenya News Agency
KTN:	Kenya Television Network
MCK:	Media Council of Kenya
MRC:	Mombasa Republican Council
NARC:	National Alliance Rainbow Coalition
NMG:	Nation Media Group
ODM:	Orange Democratic Movement
PEV:	Post Elections Violence
PNU:	Party of National Unity
PPU:	Presidential Press Unit
RMS:	Royal Media Services
RWB:	Reporters Without Borders
RQ1:	Research Question One
RQ2:	Research Question Two
RQ3:	Research Question Three
SG:	Standard Group
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN:	United Nations
VPPU:	Vice President Press Unit